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Afghanistan: Regime Military and Political Capabilities After the Soviet Withdrawal

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An Intelligence Assessment

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October 1988

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Afghanistan: Regime Military and Political Capabilities After the Soviet Withdrawal

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [redacted]
[redacted] Office of Near Eastern and South
Asian Analysis, with contributions by [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] Defense Intelligence
Agency: [redacted]

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[redacted] It was coordinated with the
Directorate of Operations. [redacted]

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be
directed to the Chief, South Asia Division, NESA, [redacted]
[redacted]

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**Afghanistan: Regime Military
and Political Capabilities
After the Soviet Withdrawal**

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 20 September 1988
was used in this report.*

The Afghan regime probably will collapse within six to 12 months following the departure of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. The regime will concentrate its forces around key cities and military installations and along the roads from Kabul to the Soviet border and to the provincial centers of Qandahar and Jalalabad. If the regime defends just these key areas, it faces an enormous task for which its military resources, hampered by many longstanding problems, are not sufficient.

Manpower remains the key to regime prospects, but the likelihood of increasing the quantity and quality of personnel is not good. Kabul will have to scrape together an additional 40,000 troops to replace the Soviet forces guarding key cities, military facilities, and roads. Even if Kabul raises the additional manpower, doubling its estimated 40,000-man force, few will be willing to fight once the Soviets are gone. Morale is chronically low in Afghan army units, and desertions are increasing. Logistic and command and control problems also will diminish the combat effectiveness of regime forces.

Airpower has been crucial to Soviet and regime military activities, both in terms of combat operations and for resupply. After the Soviets leave, the number of aircraft available to support regime operations will be more than cut in half. The difference will be particularly noticeable in heliborne operations where the Afghans had only about 12 percent of the helicopters. This will limit the Afghan military's ability to resupply isolated garrisons by air, to provide protection from ambushes along the roads, and to provide much close air support to its troops.

The regime does have military advantages over the insurgents. Its forces generally are dug in, forcing the insurgents to attack or besiege fortified positions. Kabul has some paramilitary forces, in particular the Sarandoy and the Ministry of State Security forces, that will fight hard for the regime. Kabul's superior firepower and the insurgents' lack of experience in conducting conventional operations may enable the regime to hold on to some cities for months after the Soviet withdrawal. Eventually, however, we believe the insurgents will put enough pressure on the cities to topple the Communist regime.

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Although military factors are the most important to the regime's survival, internal political cohesion of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan will have a major impact on Kabul's staying power. The Soviet withdrawal will push regime factionalism past the breaking point, further undermining its military efforts. The Soviets have had to expend considerable effort during the past year to keep the regime's Parchami and Khalqi factions from trying to eliminate each other. As the Soviets leave, we believe there is a chance the Khalqi faction will attempt to oust the Parchamis.

Regime efforts to split the resistance and win the regime significant new support have resulted in no significant diminution of insurgent pressure and have largely limited Communist Party membership to Kabul, Jalalabad, and a few other regime-held cities. The regime will have even less to offer potential collaborators when the support of Soviet troops is withdrawn. Factional struggles and the insurgent threat are likely to cause an exodus of party members once the Soviet troops are gone. Many regime officials and military officers have begun contacting the insurgents, attempting to make deals. After the Soviet withdrawal, many ranking regime officials probably will flee the country, while lesser known figures are almost certain to take advantage of resistance offers of asylum.

The regime's only chance for survival is to promote serious factional fighting among the insurgents. [] the regime and the Soviets are counting on the often violent insurgent factionalism to undercut the guerrillas' military capabilities and to boost the regime's chances for survival. The insurgents have managed to keep intergroup warfare inside Afghanistan under control, and we believe they can continue until they have brought down the Kabul regime. [] insurgent field commanders from various parties are increasing cooperation as they mount assaults on cities and towns abandoned by the Soviets.

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Scope Note

When the withdrawal of Soviet troops is complete, the Afghan regime will be on its own for the first time since late 1979. This paper explores the Afghan regime's prospects for survival after the completion of the withdrawal. It examines the regime's military and political strategies, how successful these have been, the military forces available to the regime, and what has to happen if the regime is to survive.

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**Afghanistan: Regime Military
and Political Capabilities
After the Soviet Withdrawal**

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With the Soviets finally resolved to leave Afghanistan, a key intelligence question is whether the Kabul regime can survive. The regime is utilizing considerable effort to expand its Armed Forces, to broaden its base of political support, and to widen splits in the resistance. The Afghan Communists also are helped by a change in the strategic equation—before the regime was trying to defeat the insurgents, now the insurgents will be trying to defeat the regime. At the same time the regime has many weaknesses that make it extremely brittle and give it a short life expectancy, in our judgment. These include unreliable armed forces, internal factionalism, and widespread popular antipathy toward the regime.

Regime Military Strategy

The ruling People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) plans to hold Kabul and other major cities while abandoning most of the countryside once the Soviets pull out. Soviet and regime forces continue to improve Kabul's perimeter defenses

Pay incentives and other privileges are being increased to ensure loyalty.

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The army troops will be replaced primarily with Ministry of State Security soldiers.

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The regime also appears to be preparing contingency plans to establish a new capital in northern Afghanistan centered around Mazar-e Sharif,

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possibly as a fallback position if Kabul is captured. Kabul recently took the first step in this process by creating a Northern Administrative Zone in February containing the 10 provinces nearest the Soviet border. President Najibullah has appointed a deputy prime minister to head the zone and named a military commander for the area. According to the Embassy in Kabul and press reports, Moscow has pledged large amounts of direct aid to the north, hoping to build a base of pro-Soviet sentiment for the period after all Soviet combat units have left the country. The northern zone gives the regime a redoubt—with less area to defend, although not all 10 provinces will be secured, and shorter lines of communication to the USSR—if Kabul cannot be held.

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Falling Back

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A major element of the regime's plans is the redeployment of those units that are in exposed or isolated areas that cannot be reinforced or resupplied easily. By doing this, the regime can reinforce the major cities and roads out of Kabul, Jalalabad, and Qandahar. This action will alleviate some of Kabul's most pressing manpower needs as well as conserve the regime's strength and supplies for defense of the most critical areas. Abandoning the isolated garrisons also will make resupply of the Afghan forces easier and reduce the number of roads that need to be protected. In our judgment, however, the regime will not abandon without a fight those provincial capitals—Khowst and Feyzabad, for example—that are isolated.

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Concurrent with redeploying and consolidating its military strength, the regime continues efforts to broaden its base of popular support and to split the resistance. It has sought new constituencies from among women, youths, minorities, and tribal and ethnic leaders. It has arranged elections and created "opposition" parties to enhance its legitimacy and to create the perception of broad-based support. To split the resistance, Kabul has offered arms, money, regional autonomy, and regime positions—such as Minister of Defense to Jamiat-i-Islami commander Ahmad Shah Masood—to insurgent commanders. These efforts, however, have met with minimal success.

Regime Strengths

Despite the regime's poor military record during the war, it does have strengths that it hopes will enable it to survive. In our view, Kabul's strategy is designed to take advantage of these strengths:

- Redeploying and concentrating regime units into fortified garrisons around the major cities will enable the regime to make better use of its superior firepower, making direct assaults against regime garrisons extremely costly for the insurgents.
- Outlying posts surrounding the main garrisons captured by the insurgents would be subjected to heavy artillery fire. Concentrated artillery fire would make continued guerrilla occupation and exploitation of these smaller posts, from which assaults could be launched on the main positions, untenable.
- The resistance has had significant difficulty neutralizing the extensive minefields surrounding regime garrisons and posts, an obstacle which undoubtedly has prevented the insurgents from overrunning some of the larger regime garrisons.
- Concentrating its forces in a few major areas should enable the regime to exercise better command and control and to more quickly send reinforcements to threatened garrisons.
- Although improved insurgent air defenses have negated government close air support and forced the regime to alter its air tactics, high-altitude bombing

aimed at surrounding villages and large insurgent concentrations could prevent the insurgents from massing in the numbers required to overrun consolidated regime positions. [REDACTED]

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The insurgent operation against Spin Buldak is a good example of where the regime's advantages kept the insurgents from overrunning an important garrison. In our view, the defensive fortifications, extensive minefields, and firepower of the garrison prevented the insurgents from capturing it in their initial assaults in June. This gave the regime time to send reinforcements from the infantry division at Qandahar to Spin Buldak and force the insurgents to break off the siege. At the same time, this division sent combat groups to at least two other threatened areas. Soviet air support was needed, however, to back up these additional operations while the Afghan Air Force was occupied with supporting Spin Buldak. The garrison finally collapsed in September when the insurgents were able to cut it off from its sources of supply, the militia forces defected, and there was no Soviet support available. [REDACTED]

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The regime can take advantage of insurgent concern for the safety of the civilian population. Because most regime garrisons are located inside cities and towns, the civilian population provides a shield behind which the regime can hide. Not taking into account the safety of the civilian population could erode the popular support the insurgents now enjoy. According to the US Consulate in Peshawar, concern for the welfare of the civilians was another factor leading to the guerrillas' decision to break off the attack on Spin Buldak. [REDACTED]

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After the Soviets Leave . . . The Afghan Army

In spite of the regime's preparations and advantages, we believe the Afghan army cannot undertake successful offensive combat operations against the insurgents after the Soviet withdrawal. Despite intense Soviet efforts to improve the Afghan army's performance, it is a poorly motivated and trained force that

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suffers from major deficiencies—including manpower shortages, low morale, logistic difficulties, and poor command and control—that limit its combat capabilities. Soviet support—particularly advisers and air and artillery support—has played a crucial role in keeping the army going and is, in our view, responsible for what few successes the army has had. Although some units probably will hold out for several months after the Soviets leave, we believe the army's chronic problems ultimately will undercut its ability to successfully fight the insurgents. []

Manpower Shortages

In our view, the army's greatest deficiency is its shortage of trained and disciplined manpower at all levels. Army units are manned at 30 percent or less of full strength. Early this year, for example, the 25th Infantry Division at Khowst had less than 10 percent of its authorized 10,500 men. Manpower shortages

will become particularly acute after the Soviets withdraw and the Afghans have to take over many functions the Soviets now perform. We believe the army—which comprises five commando brigades, 13 infantry divisions, and three armored divisions—has only some 40,000 men, as compared to an authorized strength of 170,000 troops. Unless the regime can raise and keep at least 70,000 to 80,000 troops, we do not believe the army can protect effectively the major cities and lines of communication after the withdrawal. []

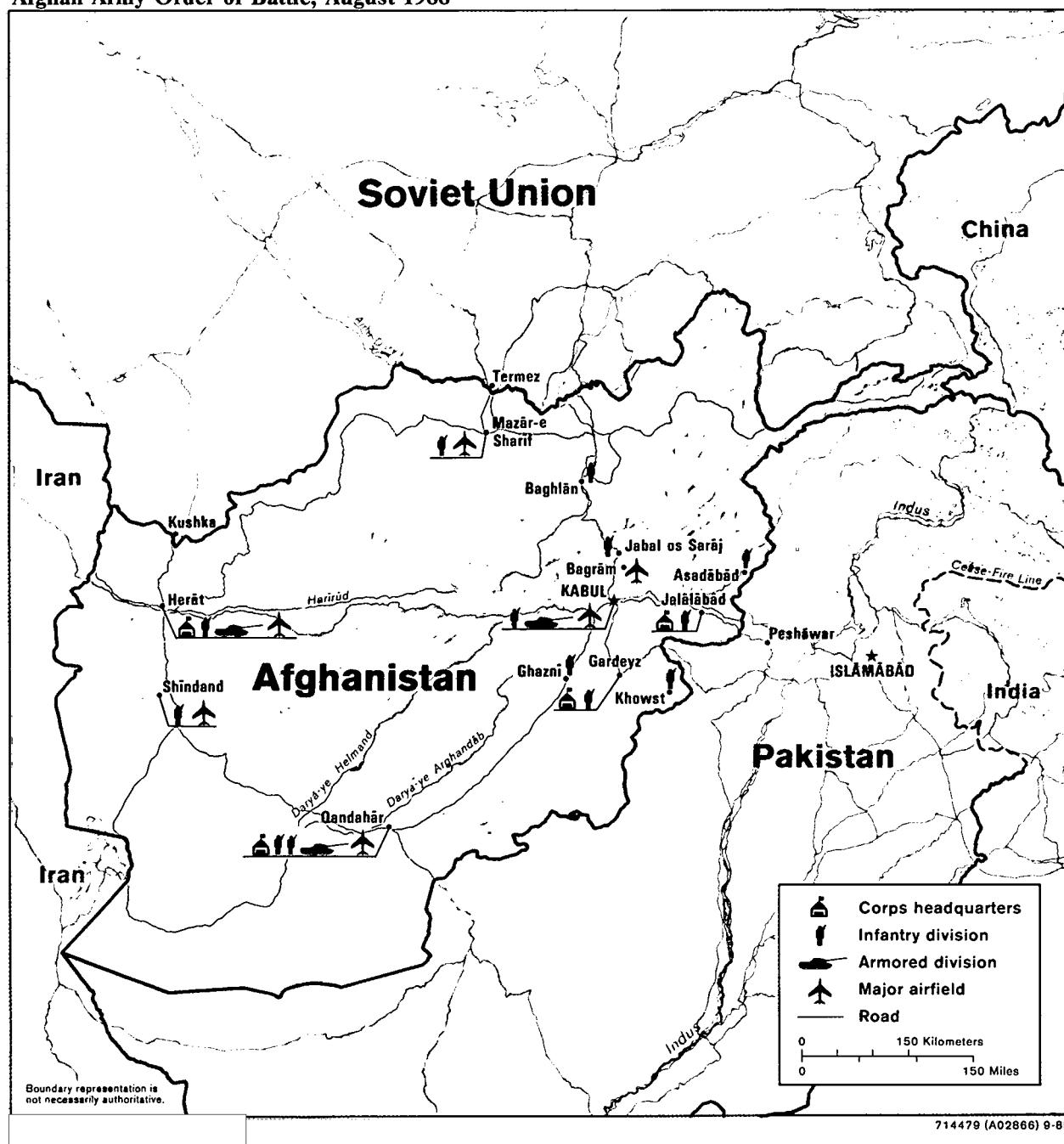
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After the Soviet withdrawal, the Afghans will have to take on additional security tasks—particularly urban and airfield security—now performed by the Soviets. In our view, to protect Kabul, Qandahar, Herat, Jalalabad, Mazar-e Sharif, Shindand Airfield, and

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Figure 3
Afghan Army Order of Battle, August 1988



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Table 1
Manpower in the Afghan Armed Forces ^a

	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan	US Government Estimates
Totals	163,000	134,000 to 154,000
Army	40,000	40,000
Air Force	... ^b	5,000 to 10,000
Air Defense ^c	... ^b	2,000
Paramilitary Forces		
Border Security Forces	30,000	22,000
Ministry of State Security ^d	27,000	20,000 to 25,000
Sarandoy	30,000	15,000 to 20,000
Militias		
Defense of the Revolution ^e	36,000 ^f	10,000 to 15,000
Tribal	... ^b	20,000

^a As of 15 May 1988.

^b No figures given.

^c Includes missile and radar troops only.

^d Formerly known as KHAD.

^e Village defense militias.

^f This figure may include the tribal militias.

the major lines of communication (Jeyretan to Kabul and Kabul to Jalalabad) with a force equivalent to the Soviet units currently protecting these areas will require approximately 30,000 to 40,000 additional Afghan troops. []

Road security will be particularly important if the regime intends to keep its forces supplied. More than one-third of the Soviet forces in Afghanistan were used to protect roads or to man security posts in 1987, []

[] We estimate the Soviets used some 16,000 troops to protect the road from the Soviet border to Kabul. This includes not only those troops manning the security posts along the roads, but also the troops protecting the garrisons and logistic bases, the units used in offensive operations

along the route, engineer elements, pipeline troops, and traffic control units. The road from Kabul to Jalalabad tied down 3,000 additional Soviet troops.

To fill the gaps created by the Soviet withdrawal around the major cities, airfields, and roads the Afghans will withdraw forces from their outlying garrisons. Some of these withdrawals—such as from Barikowt to Asadabad or from Paktika Province to the road between Ghazni and Qandahar—have taken place. Afghan Border Security Forces, for instance, have been given responsibility for most of the major roads since the Soviet withdrawal began on 15 May, while the Sarandoy and the Ministry of State Security may have been given responsibility for the Kabul to Jalalabad area. []

We do not believe that the regime can redeploy sufficient forces to come close to replacing the Soviet troops securing the cities, roads, and airfields. Moreover, redeploying its forces raises several risks for the regime. Kabul will, for example, be hard pressed to avoid the appearance that its forces are in retreat. In some instances, the regime will lose large quantities of weapons, ammunition, and other supplies—as it did when its forces abandoned Barikowt and Ali Kheyl this spring. Large numbers of troops are likely to

desert, as did a battalion of the 3rd Border Brigade, which headed for Pakistan when ordered to fall back on Qandahar. Abandonment of local tribal militias as the regime evacuates outlying bases is likely to cause militias elsewhere to reevaluate their support for the regime. [redacted]

Poor Morale

Even if the regime can scrape together enough troops to replace the Soviet troops stationed around important points, morale is likely to be low and desertions a major problem. Desertions have been commonplace among all regime military ranks and within all regime army and paramilitary forces throughout the war, [redacted]

[redacted] We estimate that 90 percent of the army and much of the paramilitary are effected by morale problems, and prospects for improving morale after the Soviets leave are dim. The major reason for the poor morale is that many of the troops and officers view themselves as "quislings" helping a foreign force subjugate their own people, [redacted]

Although this perception may dissipate once the Soviets leave, we believe many military personnel will be reluctant to die for a Communist regime in Kabul that many Afghans regard as an alien, un-Islamic creation of the Soviets. Other troops are insurgent infiltrators and collaborators waiting for an opportune moment to join local resistance forces. [redacted]

[redacted] numerous Afghan army units, some as large as divisional headquarters, have been offering to surrender to insurgent leaders but have been advised to wait until the Soviets withdraw. Military morale is particularly likely to fall and desertions increase if the insurgents score major successes after the Soviets have withdrawn completely. [redacted]

Afghan cultural traits also contribute to the desertion rates and low morale. Troop loyalties are often affected by age-old tribal and village customs and allegiances, ethnic background, and even regime factionalism. [redacted]

many individuals are forcibly conscripted into the army, and most are sent far away from their native village or province to separate the troops from the local inhabitants. This government policy has had

occasional success—for example, the Uzbek-dominated Jowzjani commandos in Qandahar. These commandos have been deployed from their home province to Qandahar to wrest control of the city from the insurgents. Because they had no ethnic, tribal, or cultural ties to the local population, they were ruthless in dealing with them and with the insurgents. We believe the insurgent forces, coupled with local inhabitants from the Qandahar area, singled out and increased attacks on regime units to force the Jowzjanis out of the city. Local leaders also protested to the regime authorities. These efforts pressured the regime enough that it sent the Jowzjanis back to Jowzjan Province. This had a negative impact on morale in army and militia units because of their strong allegiances to their native tribe and village. Moreover, lack of popular support in the areas in which they are stationed has created discontent in both the army and paramilitary forces, [redacted]

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Table 3
Desertions From the Afghan
Armed Forces, 1987-88

1987	
September	200
October	300
November	350
December	1,050
1988	
January	500
February	500
March	400
April	700
May	1,400
June	500

Faulty Logistic Support

The army suffers from chronic equipment shortages and logistic problems that degrade the performance of many regime units and lead to widespread desertions. Although some of the regime's supply shortcomings will be alleviated when the Soviets leave because they will turn over to the Afghans a substantial amount of weapons and materiel, including ammunition and petroleum, oil, and lubricants (POL), we expect this will provide only a short-lived boost to the regime forces. Many regime units in isolated areas are not likely to receive much, if any, of the Soviet supplies. The army's limited maintenance capabilities suggest much of the Soviet equipment will be inoperable within a few months, in our judgment. Even if Soviet deliveries increase or Moscow turns over large quantities of equipment, the Afghan Government will have trouble finding and training soldiers to operate the new vehicles, preventing regime units from successfully engaging in prolonged operations. [REDACTED]

In the past, insurgent interdiction efforts have seriously limited food, water, fuel, ammunition, and equipment deliveries to many army units. These problems are likely to increase once the Soviets withdraw.

Without Soviet protection for regime supply convoys, we believe the resistance will control most of the main roads and halt most regime overland resupply efforts. Aerial resupply would depend upon the Air Force's limited capabilities, which we believe will be insufficient. Cut off from regular resupply and with only limited maintenance capabilities, we do not expect most regime units in the provinces to engage in prolonged offensive operations—instead they will remain in defensive positions in their garrisons. [REDACTED]

Shaky Command and Control

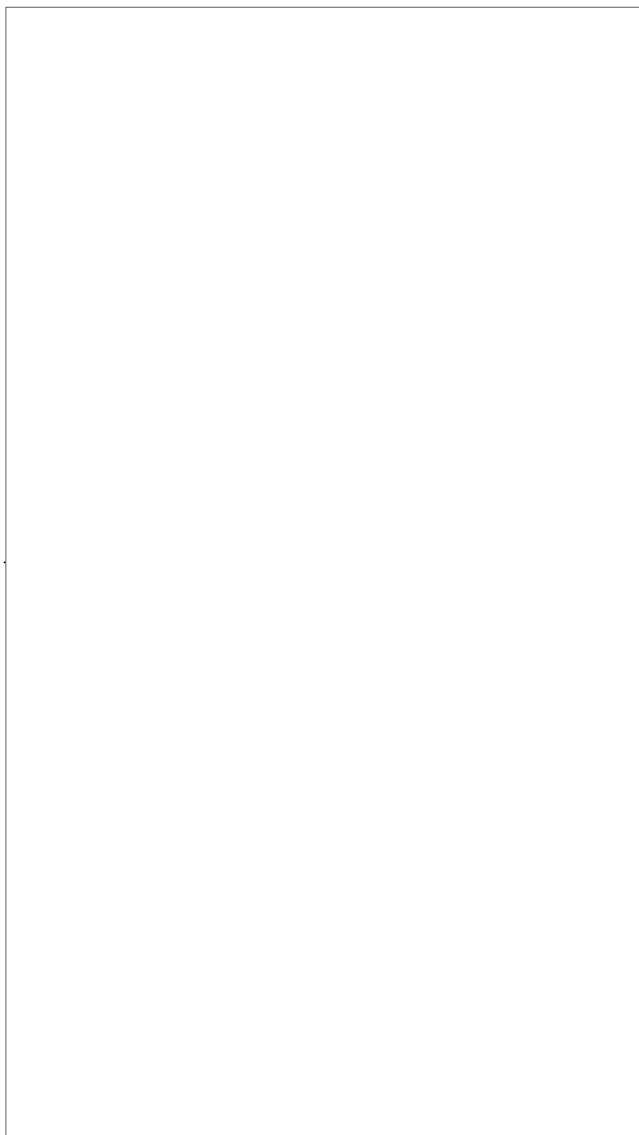
In our view, poor leadership and communication problems also plague regime forces and will limit their ability to operate effectively without the expertise of Soviet advisers. Most decisionmaking is done by Soviet advisers operating down to at least battalion

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command and control. The severe problems in lower level units, however, will require much time to correct.

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Paramilitary Forces: A Wet Paper Bag Full of Holes

To alleviate manpower shortages in the regular army, the Afghan regime has put considerable emphasis on expanding and improving its paramilitary forces. We believe the regime intends to rely heavily on these units once the Soviets leave. In our view, however, the paramilitary forces are experiencing significant problems and, with the exception of the Sarandoy and the Ministry of State Security units, are unlikely to be of much help to the regime.

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Ministry of State Security

The counterinsurgency role of the Afghan Ministry of State Security has expanded sharply in recent years, largely because of the inability of the Afghan Armed Forces to control the resistance.' The Ministry, primarily an internal intelligence service, has formed its own combat units. Although the activities of the Afghan intelligence organization have made a difference in some antiguerrilla operations, the overall impact of the Ministry's activities on the insurgency has been limited.

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One of the most active counterinsurgency programs of the Ministry is the use of terrorism in Pakistan to weaken support for the resistance. Although Islamabad's policy has not been fundamentally altered, the sabotage and subversion sponsored by Kabul—and probably the Soviets—have intensified the debate in Pakistan over the refugee presence and aid to the resistance. The Afghan intelligence service probably has sufficient assets to continue, or perhaps increase, the current level of bombings in Pakistan.

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level, [redacted] Poorly maintained radios, a shortage of communications equipment and spare parts, illiterate officers, and factionalism within the officer corps will erode the effectiveness of troubled units and will undermine the morale and confidence of the troops. [redacted]

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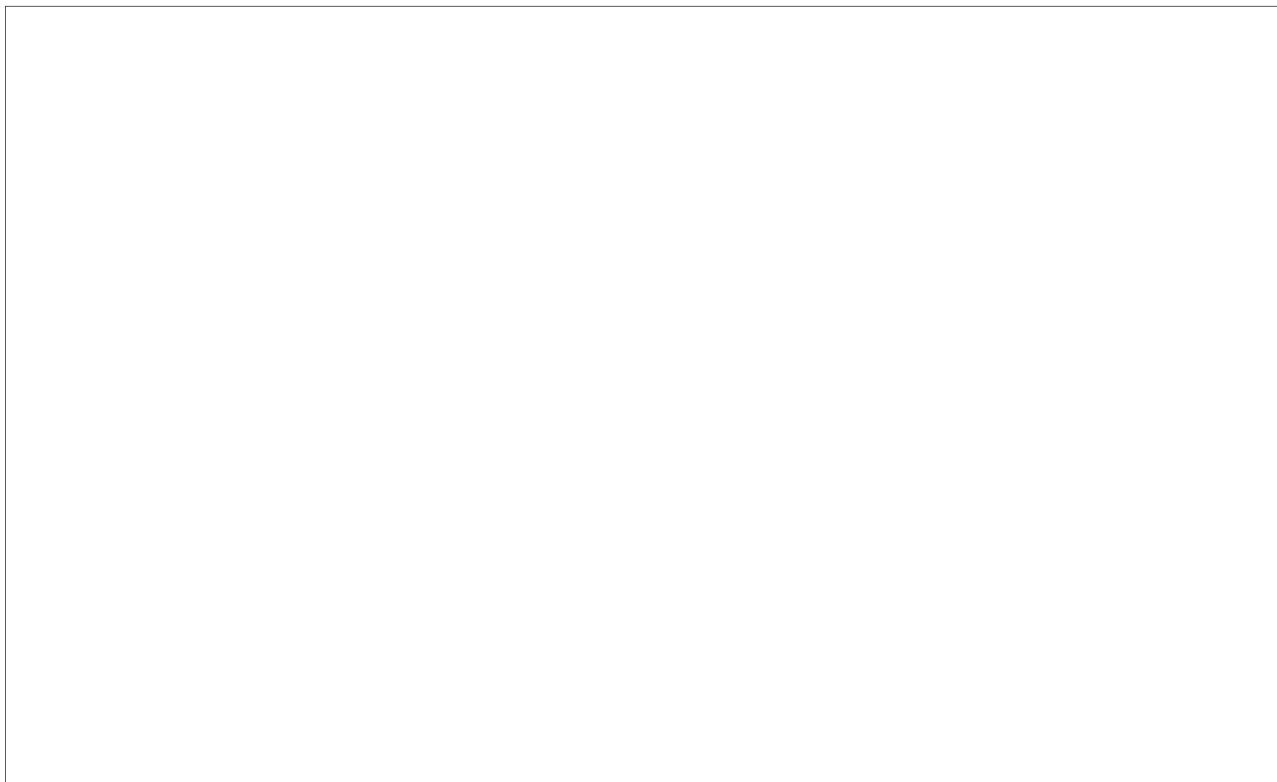
The regime has been attempting to correct these problems [redacted] Its efforts include [redacted] [redacted] a plan to further centralize the army's

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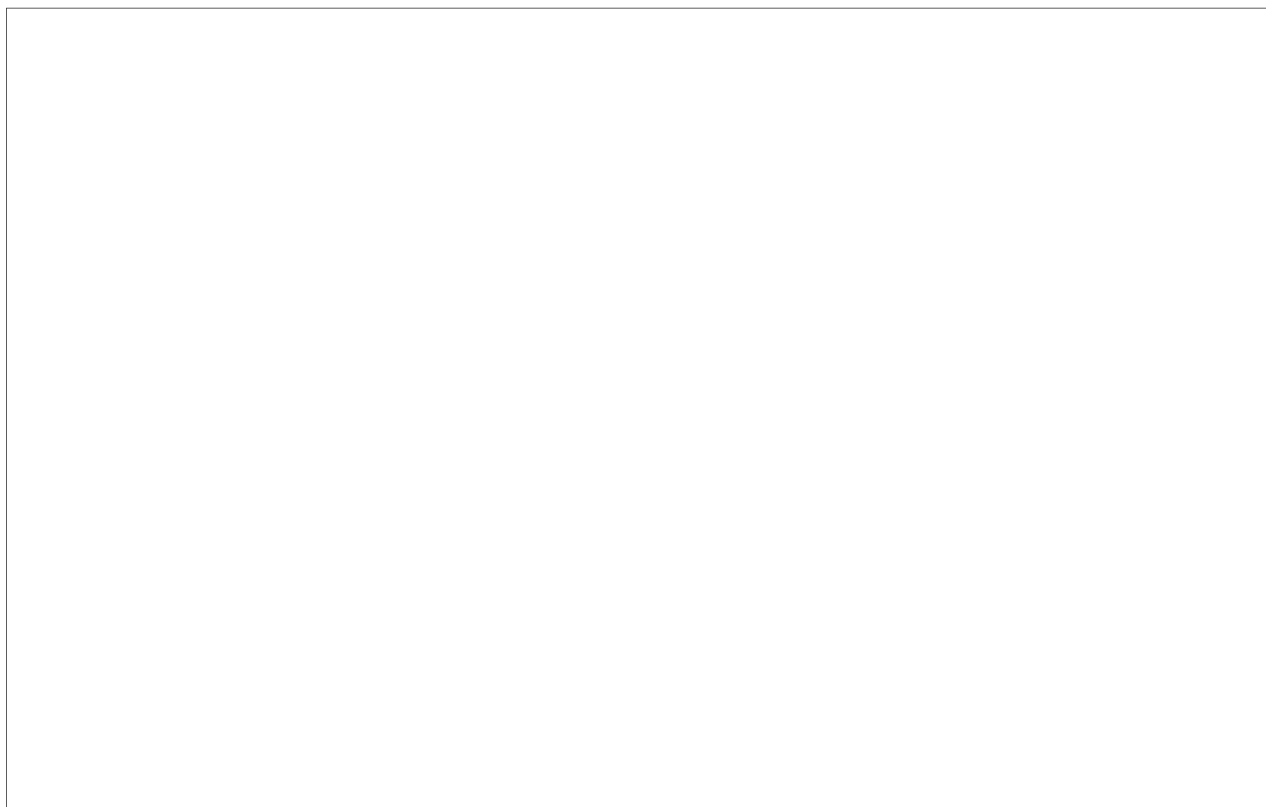
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When Soviet forces withdraw from Afghanistan, the Parchami-dominated Ministry of State Security personnel almost certainly will form the backbone of the regime's Armed Forces. [redacted]

[redacted] Ministry of State Security troops will soon assume more responsibility for security within Kabul while army troops man the capital's perimeter defenses. Many intelligence personnel probably would fight to the death to avoid capture by the insurgents. Even so, the Ministry's ability to support the regime will be limited outside Kabul without Soviet protection. [redacted]

Sarandoy

This police/light infantry force under the Ministry of Interior is, we believe, one of the most capable regime paramilitary units. In late 1984 the Sarandoy was expanded, given new weaponry, and assigned more tasks. [redacted] We estimate Sarandoy manpower has now reached 15,000 to 20,000, about 35 to 40 percent of the authorized level. [redacted] the Sarandoy are responsible for maintaining the regime's presence in provincial capitals and supporting the regular army in combat operations. The Sarandoy are particularly prominent in operations in the vicinity of Kabul. This force, under the leadership of President Najibullah's principal Khalqi-faction rival, Interior Minister Gulabzoi, could be used in a coup against the current Parchami-faction regime, in our view. [redacted]

Border Security Forces

This multirole force is subordinate to the Ministry of National Defense, and its units fall under the direct command of Afghan army divisional commanders. The Border Security Forces man numerous battalion- and company-size outposts along the borders with Pakistan and Iran. Though primarily defensive in nature, the Border troops participate in operations against insurgent strongholds and supply routes. We estimate that currently the Border Forces have fewer than 20,000 troops. The Border Forces have taken the brunt of insurgent attacks since the beginning of the Soviet withdrawal, and we estimate they have suffered at least 2,000 casualties and desertions—a

whole battalion headed for Pakistan when it was ordered to fall back on Qandahar. We expect the Border Forces to disintegrate rapidly once the Soviets completely withdraw. [redacted]

Defense of the Revolution Force

These forces consist of two organizations subordinate to the Ministry of Interior. They are responsible primarily for carrying the regime's Marxist message to outlying areas and providing support to regular army units. Although the regime has been bolstering its Defense of the Revolution Force, they are poorly equipped, in our view. We estimate the size of this Force at approximately 10,000 to 15,000 troops. The two subunits are:

- *Revolution Defender units.* These poorly armed tribal militias are responsible for securing their villages against insurgent attacks. [redacted]
- *Soldiers of the Revolution units.* First noted in 1985, these forces consist of party members or candidate members who act as armed propagandists for Kabul in rural areas. We believe their function is almost entirely propaganda [redacted]

Tribal Militias

The Ministry of State Security and the Ministry of Nationalities and Tribal Affairs have supported and armed tribes and former insurgents to limit guerrilla infiltration from Pakistan. The Kabul regime has attached these tribal forces—approximately 20,000 troops—to army units to participate in operations in their tribal area. The most effective tribal militia, Ismatullah Muslim Achekzai and his force of almost 1,000 men, effectively hampered insurgent resupply into Qandahar during the first half of 1986 before guerrilla successes and Ismatullah's feuding with Kabul diminished his capabilities. In general, however, [redacted] the tribal militias are unreliable, tending to take arms from the government and then cooperating with the insurgents. [redacted]

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Effectiveness

In our view, the regime's paramilitary forces—with the exception of the Sarandoy and the Ministry of State Security—will not provide much assistance to the regular military once the Soviets leave. We judge that most of the regime's paramilitary groups, particularly the militias, will quickly disintegrate once subjected to intense insurgent pressure and deprived of Soviet support. We believe Afghan army support to the militias is unlikely as the army probably will be deployed to protect key cities and lines of communication, leaving the militias on their own. []

[] militia units in the Qandahar and Kabul areas began defecting to the resistance as early as June and July—within two months of the beginning of the Soviet withdrawal. []

[] The effectiveness of the Afghan paramilitary forces has been and will continue to be hampered by some of the same problems that have hurt the regular army. The border troops and the militias, in particular, are always understrength. Many units—including the militia—have received only limited training and some lack heavy weapons. Their morale is poor and, in our judgment, has worsened recently. Moreover, these forces have either been penetrated by the insurgents or have colluded extensively with them—particularly in the Qandahar area. []

The most reliable regime paramilitary forces, the Sarandoy and the Ministry of State Security units, will become increasingly important, however, as the Soviet withdrawal progresses. If the PDPA does not split between the Parchamis and the Khalqis—which would put the Ministry and the Sarandoy on opposite sides of the party fence—these units will form the bulwark of the regime's defense, especially in Kabul. If the regime must fall back on Mazar-e Sharif and form a separate state in the north, the Sarandoy and the Ministry of State Security units probably will be the only forces left to defend the regime. []

The Air Force: Key to Regime Survival

Air Force capabilities—especially ground attack and transport—will be crucial to the regime's ability to survive, in our view. With the complete withdrawal of the Soviet 40th Army Air Force and Military Advisory Group, we believe the Afghan Air Force cannot maintain basic support for the ground forces. Without Soviet assistance, the Afghan Air Force cannot maintain many of its aircraft, train and recruit new pilots, and protect airfields. []

After the Withdrawal: The Remains

The number of aircraft available to support Kabul's forces after a Soviet withdrawal will be more than cut in half. The Afghan Air Force comprised only about 12 percent of the helicopter force, 50 percent of the operational ground attack aircraft, and about half the transport capability of all aircraft in Afghanistan just before the beginning of the Soviet withdrawal. []

Moreover, the Soviets use their air assets more effectively than do the Afghans, and, as a result, the impact of the Soviet withdrawal will be far greater than the number of aircraft alone would indicate. We estimate Soviet aircraft flew approximately 160,000 sorties in Afghanistan in each of the last two years. []

[] we believe the Soviets routinely fly significantly more sorties per aircraft than the Afghans. Also, because the Soviets can rotate aircraft from the Soviet Union and maintain their aircraft more effectively, the 40th Army's inventory of serviceable aircraft was not degraded because of poor maintenance. As the Soviets leave, however, we expect the operational readiness rate for Afghan aircraft to decline significantly. []

We believe the most glaring deficiency of the Afghan Air Force will be its inadequate helicopter force. During the past two years the Soviets maintained a force of approximately 350 helicopters in Afghanistan. In contrast, we estimate the Afghan Air Force

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Insurgent Capabilities

The departure of Soviet forces, coupled with ongoing improvements in the insurgency's military capabilities, will quicken the shift of the balance of power to the insurgents, in our view. Although most of Afghanistan will come under the control of the resistance within a few months after the Soviets leave, resistance weaknesses in some areas could allow some pockets of the regime to hold out for perhaps as long as a year. [redacted]

The resistance already enjoys several advantages over Afghan regime forces, advantages which would multiply after the Soviets withdraw.^a

- The insurgents almost certainly have more manpower available to them than the regime; we estimate the resistance has about 350,000 guerrillas—defined as any armed insurgent performing a military function—and approximately 170,000 active full-time insurgents in combat against the regime.*
- The resistance also enjoys overwhelming popular support that allows various guerrilla organizations to tap the sympathetic population for recruits, supplies, intelligence, transport, and communications. Moreover, we believe the average rank-and-*

[redacted]

file insurgent and his commander is more experienced, more motivated, and arguably better trained than their demoralized, forcibly conscripted government counterparts. [redacted]

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The insurgent ability to deal with longstanding regime advantages in firepower and organization is steadily improving, in our view. New and advanced weapons such as the Stinger surface-to-air missile, the Milan antitank wire-guided missile, and the 120-mm mortar are neutralizing regime advantages in airpower, armored vehicles, and fortifications. Moreover, the likelihood that the insurgents will capture large amounts of artillery and armor from defecting or captured regime garrisons will increase insurgent firepower relative to the remaining regime forces.

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Insurgent commanders continue to coordinate their operations and cooperate on the battlefield with some insurgent groups establishing joint bases in Afghanistan. The resistance also has been improving its indigenous logistic infrastructure, constructing logistic bases near the border, establishing distribution centers in the interior, increasing their transportation assets, and stockpiling weapons and ammunition throughout the country. [redacted]

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operated about 50 helicopters. To provide support to Afghan ground forces after a Soviet withdrawal, we believe the Afghans will either be forced to expand their helicopter force significantly and occupy the Soviet-only helicopter bases, such as Konduz and Jalalabad, or relinquish control of important areas of the country to the insurgents. We doubt, however, they can expand their helicopter force much since they would immediately run into pilot shortages and additional logistic burdens. Without an adequate

number of helicopters and bases from which to operate, the Afghans cannot employ heliborne assets effectively against the insurgents, allowing the insurgents greatly increased freedom of maneuver.

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A second major problem for the Afghans once the Soviets withdraw will be providing air logistic support to major garrisons and isolated outposts. The Afghans, in our judgment, lack sufficient AN-12s to do

the job. They also do not possess the larger IL-76 transport. Although most of the Afghan small-to-medium transport aircraft are well suited for the country's many short, unimproved airfields, the Afghans will be forced to fly many more sorties with their smaller aircraft to deliver the same amount of cargo now handled by the Soviets and might be unable to carry large, bulky military items—such as armored vehicles or trucks. An inadequate number of transport helicopters, coupled with the limited capability of the Afghan civilian airline Ariana (formerly called Bakhtar), would further worsen this problem. We believe the decrease in airlift capability following the Soviet withdrawal will result in dramatic supply shortages in provincial garrisons throughout Afghanistan, especially with the increase in insurgent attacks on convoys after Soviet road security forces have departed. []

Certain types of crucial missions, such as aerial reconnaissance and air defense missions flown almost exclusively by Soviets, will be difficult for the Afghans to assume because of their other commitments and limited assets. []

Unreliable Pilots

We believe a third major problem limiting the effectiveness of the Afghan Air Force in the post-Soviet period will be the lack of qualified pilots. The Soviets can provide the Afghans with all the aircraft they require, but the problem of finding enough pilots to fly them will remain. The quality and quantity of the pilot force is low for reasons ranging from limited technical expertise and low morale to political unreliability. In addition, many of the older, more experienced pilots defected to the insurgency years ago. []

The low technical expertise of Afghan pilots is a major factor limiting the Air Force's effectiveness, in our view. Afghan pilots generally are not proficient at all-weather or night flying and have difficulty with even standard flight procedures, such as landings and takeoffs. The Afghans have had difficulty flying modern aircraft like the swingwing SU-22 and adjusting to new surface-to-air missile countermeasures—such as night takeoffs and landings for transports. []

We believe Kabul cannot rapidly expand the pilot force despite recent improvements to the training programs in Afghanistan. Training of Afghan pilots takes several years. Basic classroom instruction in the Russian language and technical subjects for at least a year precedes actual flight training. Even after suitable candidates enter pilot training, the washout rate is very high because they lack technical backgrounds. In addition, emphasizing political reliability also has kept the pilot force relatively small, in our view. []

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Low pilot morale has been a persistent problem affecting the performance of the Air Force, and we believe it is likely to worsen following the Soviet withdrawal. On several occasions pilots have refused to fly, gone on strike, and rioted. After the Soviets are gone, pilot morale probably will fall dramatically as Afghan air losses increase and defections and refusals to fly also increase. []

Support Shortcomings

Airfield security, maintenance, and logistic shortfalls will become more pressing problems once the Soviets withdraw. When Soviet protection is gone, insurgent Stinger gunners, as well as mortar and rocket teams, can move closer to the airfields. Critical airport facilities damaged during insurgent attacks probably will not be repaired as quickly without Soviet assistance. Soviet advisers also will be missed in running the Afghan Air Force after a withdrawal, in our view. After the Soviets depart, the Afghans will not have the technical expertise to maintain their aircraft—many of them will become unserviceable. []

Supplying ordnance and POL to the Air Force may become the final determining factor of whether the Air Force flies. There have been numerous incidents in which Afghan airfields were so low on fuel that aircraft were grounded. Qandahar, for example, has been plagued by this problem continuously. The long and difficult supply lines and the wide area of operations mean that fuel often is used faster than it can be delivered. As the Soviets depart and leave behind large quantities of ordnance and POL, this problem will be alleviated—at least temporarily—at the major airfields. If the supply lines cannot be kept open, as we expect, airpower will rapidly diminish particularly in the southern part of the country where the supply lines are the longest and most vulnerable. []

The Political Dimension

In our judgment, the regime's lack of political cohesion and the failure of recurrent efforts to expand its popular support are likely to contribute to its swift demise. We believe the factors that have hindered Kabul's political efforts—including a lack of legitimacy, chronic misjudgment of popular reaction to regime

initiatives, and internal fragmentation—are likely to be of increasing importance when Soviet troops are no longer available to prop up the regime. Although we judge the Afghan military to be capable of defending fortified regime-held cities against insurgent attack for up to a year after the Soviets leave, we expect political tensions to cause the Kabul regime to collapse more rapidly. []

Since Najibullah became General Secretary of the PDPA in May 1986, the party has intensified its efforts to split the insurgents and broaden its base of support. Kabul has made numerous power-sharing offers to the opposition and offered outright bribes to susceptible tribal leaders and insurgent commanders. Kabul also has increasingly minimized its Marxist-Leninist orientation and adopted a "progressive Islamic" veneer. In our judgment, most of these changes have been cosmetic. In November 1987, for example, the regime officially dropped the word "Democratic" from the Republic of Afghanistan's official name, and Najib—as he was then known—returned the suffix "ullah" (of Allah) to his name. According to the US Embassy in Kabul, the ruling PDPA has directed members to be "friendly and supportive" toward Muslim believers and to open all official meetings with readings from the Koran. Similarly, []

[] Soviet officials teaching propaganda techniques to party members tell their students to open recruitment speeches with the phrase "bismillah" (in the name of Allah). In March the Afghan Politburo ordered the establishment of a university of Islamic theology. The regime is also trumpeting its claims to have spent almost \$36 million since 1980 on building and refurbishing mosques and founding Islamic schools. It has also promised to more than double the salaries of proregime clerics. []

Buying Off and Splitting the Insurgents

According to Najibullah's press statements, the regime's national reconciliation program is meant to expand the government's popular base by integrating ethnic, religious, occupational, and resistance groups

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***Insurgent Strategy: Protracted War
and Psychological Pressure***

Insurgent commanders almost certainly will adopt a low-risk strategy of protracted warfare emphasizing psychological and siege tactics in order to defeat the regime. They are not forcibly contesting the Soviet withdrawal although they are harassing departing units. []

The primary resistance strategy will concentrate on hastening the regime's internal collapse through psychological pressure. The resistance intends to deny Kabul the hope of retreat and survival by occupying Konduz and Mazar-e Sharif before attempting to take the capital. We believe insurgent commanders also are encouraging regime posts and garrisons to surrender or to defect by maintaining military pressure and offering fair treatment to defectors. Moreover, the resistance plans to increase underground activity in the cities by encouraging civil disobedience as well as increasing sabotage and propaganda efforts. []

If psychological pressure fails, the guerrillas' military strategy almost certainly will be one of patient, protracted siege. Insurgent commanders realize that a frontal assault on large garrisons and cities is beyond current resistance military capabilities, would require unprecedented guerrilla planning and coordination, and could potentially be very risky and costly. Moreover, guerrilla commanders near major cities are beginning to recognize the need to plan and coordinate their activities to maximize their military effectiveness and limit the amount of economic and civilian damage that may result from their opera-

tions. Insurgent tactics would include evacuating the civilian population where possible, cutting all roads, and closing the airfields. Harassing fire in the form of incessant rocket and mortar attacks would increase while local commanders would exploit any opportunity to overrun small outposts to degrade the security perimeters that now surround most cities. []

The Threat to Insurgent Victory. In our view, the greatest threat to insurgent victory is the possibility of factional fighting or a large-scale civil war. Personal rivalries between key commanders in several areas as well as the well-known fear and hatred of insurgent leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar felt by many insurgents could doom the resistance to failure and ensure the survival of the regime in portions of the country. The danger is greatest in the northeast where the bitter Jamiat-i-Islami/Hizbi Islami (Gulbuddin) rivalry has always simmered just below the surface and frequently erupted in fighting, which has temporarily hindered the progress of the insurgency. Other potential danger areas are Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar, Paktia, Paktika, Qandahar, and Helmand Provinces, all of which have personal or tribal rivalries, which could prematurely erupt in local factional fighting. Moreover, fighting among the insurgents could occur if insurgent groups start blaming each other for their failure to overrun regime positions or from local xenophobias, as guerrilla forces who have already triumphed over regime positions in their native area move to other areas to participate in conquering other regime bastions. []

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into a national front led by the PDPA.² Soon after the program's introduction in 1987, Najibullah offered resistance commanders willing to cooperate with Kabul money, supplies, regional autonomy, and some 22 regime positions—including minister or deputy minister positions in the Ministries of Nationalities, Tribal Affairs, Domestic and External Trade, but excluding the key Ministries of Defense, Interior, and Foreign Affairs. Later offers have been similarly tailored, in our view, to maintain party control of the government apparatus while tempting insurgent leaders to defect.

[redacted] leaders of the PDPA realize factionalism is the insurgency's Achilles' heel and believe that, if the government can induce some prominent insurgent commanders into joining the regime, its chances of survival would be enhanced significantly. [redacted]

Kabul's most recent and highly publicized effort at wooing opponents into a coalition led by the PDPA was the hastily called election for the National Assembly and Senate during the period 5-15 April. According to the regime press, Najibullah offered 60 percent of the seats on the Council of Ministers—the regime Cabinet—the prime-ministership, the vice-presidency, and two-thirds of the seats in the National Assembly to the insurgents if they agreed to participate in the election. No insurgent commanders participated in the election, but the government claims to leave one-fourth to one-third of the National Assembly seats open for future insurgent converts to the regime. The party reserves for itself the presidency and top slots in the Ministries of Defense and the Interior. [redacted]

The Kabul press regularly runs tallies of the numbers of insurgents it claims are laying down arms, emphasizing the regime's willingness to welcome and support future defectors. The defection to Kabul in April

1988 of Haji Ghausuddin, a minor traditionalist resistance figure, was, for example, given wide press play. We believe Ghausuddin was awarded his current seat in the Afghan legislature to encourage further defections from resistance ranks. On the local level the regime claims that 76 percent of the members of village councils and executive committees, 50 percent of the leaders of 193 districts and subdistricts, and 13 provincial governors are nonparty figures who have been won over by the national reconciliation program. We expect such attempts to split the resistance and enhance the regime's claims to legitimacy to intensify as the Soviet withdrawal continues. [redacted]

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The regime has declared a series of cease-fires and proclaimed several Afghan provinces and districts "peace zones"—meaning that Soviet and regime forces have purportedly withdrawn from the area after local commanders joined the regime. In theory, according to the regime press, local militias take over the responsibility for "defending" the region against insurgent encroachment, while residents benefit from direct aid programs. In our judgment, however, these separate truces are largely academic, rarely if ever affecting the situation on the ground. The peace zone in the Hazarehjat area of central Afghanistan, for example, has been free of regime troops since 1979, [redacted] while the battle continues unabated in peace zones such as Nimruz, Farah, Qandahar, and Kabul itself. [redacted]

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The regime has used propaganda extensively to induce resistance factionalism. Kabul is spreading rumors that Jamiat commander Ahmad Shah Masood has agreed to a cease-fire and will serve as Minister of Defense. Government newspaper articles describing resistance defectors give the impression that only the most obdurate insurgents continue to fight. [redacted]

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[redacted] In our view, however, many insurgent commanders do

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agree with regime portrayals of resistance party leaders in Peshawar as corrupt aristocrats who use their followers to increase their own wealth. Nonetheless, despite real tension within the resistance, overall insurgent hatred of the regime and their belief that the PDPA cannot long survive the Soviet withdrawal decreases the likelihood of major guerrilla defections. []

Co-opting Nonparty Leftists

Kabul claims that through elections and placement of nonparty officials in Cabinet posts, it has transformed itself into a coalition government. The regime's constitution, ratified in November 1987, legalizes political parties other than the PDPA—so long as the parties apply to it for their charters and pledge to support "Afghanistan's traditional friendship with the Soviet Union." Since the Constitution's ratification, the Kabul press has reported that five political parties have been registered. According to the US Consulate in Peshawar, these parties are small—probably with fewer than 100 members each—and tightly controlled by the Communist Party. The Embassy believes these parties are funded directly by the Soviets and are intended to co-opt the non-Communist Afghan leftists. []

We believe the regime has reversed its earlier hostile policy toward other Afghan leftists. In the first years after the Communist Party coup, nonparty leftists and Maoists were considered ideological threats and were killed, imprisoned, or exiled by the thousands. Since Najibullah came to power, however, the regime has apparently decided to use other leftist factions to enhance attempts by the PDPA to portray its government as a democracy. In a speech to the 19th party plenum in September 1986, Najibullah announced the party's intention to absorb smaller political and labor groups, according to the Kabul media. []

[] leaders of a Maoist group, the Afghan Millat, were released after six years in prison when they promised to support the national reconciliation program. The Kabul press reported in late 1987 that the regime also sought greater support from the Revolutionary Organization of the Working People of Afghanistan—a Maoist organization with some 5,000

Turkmen, Tajik, and Uzbek members in the Mazar-e Sharif area—with promises of greater power and regime positions. We suspect from the recent appointments of the organization's leaders to regime positions that Kabul may have had at least partial success in winning the group over. []

Buying Loyalty

Kabul and Moscow have tried to buy popular support by economic aid programs and by raising civil service and military wages. We believe the public sector may employ as many as 20 percent of all Afghan wage earners, mostly in the major cities. Soviet officials have publicly claimed this group numbers about 400,000 Afghans. According to the US Embassy in Kabul, regime employees receive coupons entitling them to free food and subsidized flour, sugar, and cooking oil; free hospitalization; and salaries up to five times what the workers could command for the same labor in the private sector. The regime regularly offers gifts of cash, food, household utensils, and other commodities to refugees willing to return under Kabul's aegis and has distributed free food and supplies at polling stations and at proregime rallies, according to the US Embassy. []

Kabul and Moscow have used aid programs to woo support from rural Afghans. According to the regime press, Kabul and the Soviets signed protocols in 1987 and 1988 providing for direct economic, social, and cultural ties between "sister cities and provinces" in Afghanistan and the Soviet Union. According to regime press reports, the program began in late 1986 with Soviet "peace convoys" traveling from the Soviet-Afghan border bearing foodstuffs, blankets, boots, and cookstoves to be distributed in rural villages by the Afghan army. The regime has, according to diplomatic reporting, approached the United Nations for aid which, in our judgment, it is almost certain to use as "proof" of its acceptance as the legitimate government of Afghanistan and to buy support in rural areas. We believe future Soviet aid—such as the recently publicized gift of five "mobile cultural and propaganda units" equipped with radios, loudspeakers, and film projectors—will also aid these efforts. []

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According to the US Embassy in Kabul, the Soviets and the Afghan regime apparently expected the hand-outs to quickly win support among its rural beneficiaries. When this support did not materialize, regime officials publicly blamed the failure on corrupt party officials in the provinces. According to Western journalists who have toured regime- and Soviet-funded factories in the Kabul region, programs to enhance support within the small Afghan business community have had similarly poor results. Najibullah and Prime Minister Keshtmand have charged in numerous speeches that fraud, corruption, and mismanagement have limited the effectiveness of Soviet aid programs.

Targeting Minorities, Youth, and Women

We believe the regime has increasingly been seeking support from groups—especially minorities and women—traditionally overlooked by previous Afghan regimes and by the resistance. Such groups are more likely to be suspicious of the Pashtun-dominated resistance groups and, in our view, have long-term grievances more easily addressed by the regime.

As part of this strategy, Kabul has paid increasing attention over the past year to Afghanistan's minorities. In late October 1987 the regime created a new Ministry of Nationalities specifically charged with winning over minorities, according to the Kabul press. Before, the regime sent representatives into the provinces with orders to win over 20 to 50 Shia and Nuristani elders. The few minority members of the Kabul regime—most notably former Prime Minister Soltan Ali Keshtmand, a Shia Hazara—also have been increasingly prominent in press coverage of party activities, in our judgment. These programs appear, however, to have been downgraded since the signing of the Geneva accord in March 1988 as Najibullah has increased efforts to solidify his support among his mostly Pashtun followers. The Ministry of Nationalities, for example, was disbanded in June 1988.

We believe Kabul has been most successful in winning over minorities under attack from stronger neighbors.

Kabul offers groups—such as the Ismailis in Afghanistan's north-eastern provinces and traditionalist Shias in central

Afghanistan—weapons, supplies, and funds to form “tribal militias” to patrol their region against insurgent encroachment. The Embassy believes Kabul has reached a tacit understanding with these militias that they need not promote regime policy or perform services for the regime other than to counter local resistance groups in return for regime subsidies.

In our judgment, the overtures to minorities—such as the Shias or Ismailis who consider the minorities to be heretics—have brought Kabul limited benefits.³ Alliances with minority groups greatly reduce the chance that larger Pashtun groups will also join the regime.

Moreover, tribal militias often work with both the regime and the resistance. Attempts by Kabul to neutralize a region by purchasing tribesmen's weapons have been stymied when the tribesmen used the money to rearm themselves more effectively than before and then cooperate with the resistance.

another focus of the regime's recruiting effort is aimed at the schools, where students as young as 16 are pressed into the party. In our judgment, the regime's attention to youths accounts for a finding that 60 percent of the party's members are under 30 years old.

The regime has used several front groups to further its influence among Afghan youth, the most important of which are the Young Pioneers and the Democratic Youth of Afghanistan. The regime press claimed in mid-1987 that 150,000 children between 8 and 13 belonged to the Young Pioneers. The organization instructs the children in “political culture, social issues, mass training, and military training,” and sends about 2,000 each year to the Soviet Union for education or “rest and recreation,” according to press reports.

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The Democratic Youth of Afghanistan is the junior wing of the PDPA and is one of the party's chief recruiting pools, [redacted] Although we have seen no official age guidelines for the youth group's membership, US diplomats have noted several members in their middle thirties. According to regime media reporting, we believe members of the Democratic Youth of Afghanistan are expected to propagandize, join in occasional work details, and support the party platform in return for preference in employment and university admission. The young Communists' "youth battalions" of about 300 men guard government buildings in Kabul, Qandahar, and Herat, occasionally clashing with the resistance, [redacted]

Students who take an interest in political ideology classes and join the Young Pioneers or the Democratic Youth of Afghanistan are rewarded with higher grades and promises of jobs or scholarships upon graduation, [redacted]

Students who refuse to join front groups have, on the other hand, been threatened with expulsion or conscription, according to the US Embassy in Kabul. [redacted]

The regime has tried to expand its base by appealing to Afghan women. The Kabul media carries almost daily articles describing the regime's new literacy and employment programs for women. The Women's Democratic Organization of Afghanistan, a regime front group, has held several highly publicized conferences. [redacted] opportunities for female employment and education have grown as the war has progressed. Women make up most of the student body at Kabul University—replacing male students either away fighting or evading the press gangs that frequent Kabul's schools. [redacted]

In the male-dominated Afghan society we believe the regime's attempts to recruit women have been the least effective of its programs for disadvantaged groups. According to press reports, only 15 percent of party members are women. Since the expulsion of Babrak Karmal's mistress, Anahita Ratebzad, from the party hierarchy in October 1987, there are only two women on the Central Committee of 121 and

none in the Politburo. According to a Western journalist who has toured the Women's Democratic Organization of Afghanistan facilities, they are poorly funded and administered and are ignored by most of the women they are intended to attract. Although the regime has increasingly recruited women into several Kabul-based police and local defense forces, [redacted] such recruits are often harassed by their male counterparts. [redacted]

Wooing the Pashtun Tribes

Despite regime overtures to minorities and other nontraditional groups, we believe Kabul is giving highest priority to its relations with the Pashtun tribes on both sides of the border with Pakistan. Afghanistan's 6.5 million Pashtuns make up nearly half its population, according to academic sources. Six of the seven main resistance leaders, most resistance fighters, and most of the party membership are Pashtun. Pashtuns also control most of the strategic convoy routes along the eastern and southern borders with Pakistan. [redacted] the regime encourages Pashtun leaders to deny their areas to resistance fighters with bribes of cash and weapons, regional autonomy, and safety from Soviet and regime bombings. [redacted] Kabul also tries to strengthen its case by using regime members, including Najibullah and other high officials, with tribal ties to negotiate the deals. [redacted] however, that these direct appeals have been hindered by the fact that most regime members—especially in the Parchami wing of the party—are Kabul natives who have little in common with their nominal tribes and clans. [redacted]

In our judgment, Kabul's overtures to the Pashtuns—like its appeals to minority groups—have worked best with individuals and groups alienated from the resistance mainstream. In 1984, Kabul won over Ismatullah Achekzai—a resistance commander and hereditary leader of the Achekzai clans in the Qandahar region—who had repeatedly clashed with resistance groups from a rival clan, [redacted] other Pashtun tribal groups supporting the regime include the

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Shinwaris of Nangarhar Province, the Ahmadzai from Gardeyz, the Waziris in Paktika Province, and members of the Shabi Khel branch of the Taraki tribe in Ghazni Province. []

The successes with minority groups have brought the regime only marginal benefit because tribal leaders rarely stay bought. Some, such as Ismatullah Achekzai, are volatile and [] readily cooperate with the resistance or turn on regime forces if they believe it in their interest. We believe other formerly proregime tribes have been driven back into the resistance by the regime's excesses. Zadrani tribesmen who, [] had promised neutrality in exchange for regime gifts and assurances that they would be safe from regime attack, as an example, now appear firmly in the resistance camp after Soviet and regime bombings during the December offensive at Khowst. []

Effectiveness

In our judgment, the regime's campaigns to broaden its base and undermine the resistance have shown growing sophistication but are unlikely to succeed. We believe the PDPA's dependence on Soviet support, its "un-Islamic" rhetoric during its first years in power, and its brutality have alienated most Afghans too deeply for it to win back legitimacy easily. []

Most party members have spent most or all of their lives in the cities, and, we believe, have limited understanding of rural Afghanistan. Early programs such as land reform, for example, that were expected to win over thousands of landless peasants instead sparked mass revolt when even the intended beneficiaries of the programs considered them un-Islamic. Although the party has apparently grown more attentive to cultural nuances, such problems have continued—as when former Prime Minister Keshtmand alienated many last summer by forgetting the proper Koranic verses while opening a regime-sponsored conference. []

Most important, we believe the regime has little to offer prospective collaborators. We estimate the regime has a continuous presence in only about 10 percent of the country, and even collaborators within

regime-held cities have been fingered for resistance reprisal. The internal violence and purges within the party probably also scare off potential supporters. We believe these problems will worsen as the Soviets withdraw and security in regime-held areas erodes. []

Moreover, these continued regime overtures to the resistance, tribes, and minorities have alienated important groups within the party who view such moves as either abandonment of the party's founding principles or as direct threats to their personal power. In our view, these tensions within the party are likely to grow as a Soviet withdrawal looms closer and will severely limit the regime's chances of surviving the Soviet pullout. []

Regime Internal Troubles

Parchami Versus Khalqi

Although violent internal squabbling has been a constant since the party's creation in 1965, we believe the situation has grown worse since the introduction of the national reconciliation program in January 1987. [] open warfare between the two major party factions, Khalqi and Parchami, has often been headed off only by direct Soviet intervention. []

[] weapons were banned from Politburo meetings in 1986, but Politburo members fought each other with chairs and tables during a brawl over Najibullah's policies in May 1987. []

To the radical Khalqis, national reconciliation and offers of power and position to the party's opponents represent a sellout of party interests. [] Diplomatic reporting indicates Khalqi members oppose concessions to the opposition and agree that the regime can only survive by seizing

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the military initiative. In our judgment, many also appear to fear Najibullah will give Khalqi positions to the opposition to save himself. According to the US Embassy in Kabul, Najibullah has also tried to reduce Khalqi opposition to his programs by promoting several Khalqis within the Ministry of Defense. []

Splits in the Parchami Faction

In addition to the Khalqi-Parchami split, several divisions have emerged within the Parchami faction.

[] several Parchami supporters of former Afghan leader Babrak Karmal were arrested in April 1987 after interrupting the official Saur Revolution Anniversary Parade with chants of "long live Babrak Karmal" and "we do not trust the Politburo." The US Embassy in Kabul reports that Karmalists were also tied to a string of bombings in official installations following Babrak's departure for Moscow on 4 May 1987. The US Embassy in Kabul estimates that Najibullah has purged over 2,000 Karmal supporters from the party and bureaucratic hierarchies since last summer. Leftist factions absorbed by the party also maintain their own agendas, according to diplomatic reporting, and continue to press for more power within the party.

[]

Losing the Old Guard

The party continues to lose many of its most experienced party leaders, some of whom are concerned over the regime's durability. The former Afghan Ambassador to Poland, Gen. Abdul Qader—one of the party's founders and a leader of the 1978 coup—is refusing to return to Kabul, [] because he wants to see if the regime survives. The regime's Ambassador to Rome defected in March and Anahita Ratzebad's son, a Babrak Karmal supporter, has twice approached the US Embassy in Kabul through an intermediary claiming that he and his mother will soon leave Kabul for Yugoslavia and the West. []

Other party stalwarts are losing out in internal power struggles. Nur Ahmad Nur, formerly a leading Politburo member, has been sent into diplomatic exile as the regime's Ambassador to Poland. According to the US Embassy, Nur and many other members of the party's old guard—including key Politburo members

Saleh Mohammad Ziray and Sulayman Laeq—had earlier been lying low or feigning illness to avoid being forced to choose sides in internal party conflicts. The Khalqi Minister of Transportation has recently been fired and party members expect further shuffling of regime positions soon, according to the US Embassy in Kabul. []

The Future Unraveling

In our judgment, a Soviet withdrawal is almost certain to push internal party tensions past the breaking point. Diplomatic reporting suggests Najibullah plans to cement his control with further purges, while we judge the Khalqis are likely to attempt a coup at some point during the Soviet withdrawal. Finally, we judge an exodus of party members is almost certain, with higher ranking members fleeing the country and lesser known figures switching to the resistance, which has promised asylum to such defectors. We expect this fragmentation to seriously reduce the regime's ability to defend itself against insurgent attack, let alone to maneuver for greater control of Afghanistan. Also, the Soviet withdrawal will further reduce the incentive for Pashtun tribes to cooperate with the regime. As Kabul's ability to support the militias against their opponents in the resistance is radically diminished, the tribesmen will take the opportunity to switch to what they perceive is the winning side. []

Outlook

In our view, a quick guerrilla victory depends largely on a rapid internal collapse of the regime rather than on an overwhelming resistance military superiority. The loosely organized and decentralized insurgents do not have the manpower, equipment, nor the organization and discipline to conduct a frontal assault against fortified cities defended by well-equipped regime forces. They would have difficulty overrunning any major city if the regime's troops are willing to stand and fight. []

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While the Soviets remain in Afghanistan the regime can hold its garrisons and make a contribution to the defense of Kabul. Afghan troops manning security posts around the capital have not protected Kabul airport on their own and still require Soviet help. The efficiency and loyalty of the regime's forces is mixed. The continuing high rate of desertions will gain momentum as the Soviet prop disappears. Logistics will become uncertain as there is little prospect Kabul's troops can keep the roads open. We expect the regime to give priority to Kabul, but it is unlikely its forces will have the capacity or the will to stand up to sustained rocket attacks and other guerrilla tactics. []

The unwillingness of the regime's troops to stand and fight in most battles dims the prospects of the regime's chances of survival once the Soviets are gone. Manpower is so critically short and morale is so low that efforts to improve both are likely to be too little, too late. Redeploying and concentrating combat forces will help alleviate the manpower problem but it will have little effect on morale. Some units have already taken advantage of redeployment movements to defect. As regime defeats mount, morale will plummet and the willingness of the remaining troops to fight for the regime will most likely disappear rapidly. This, in turn, will make a Khalqi coup more likely and will increase factional fighting between the Khalqis and Parchamis. Loss of control of the major roads and airfields will increase logistic problems, which also will lower morale. The regime's only hope is to spark factional fighting between the insurgent factions. []

We believe the regime will fall within six to 12 months after the Soviet withdrawal is complete. The most vulnerable cities, Herat and Qandahar, probably will fall within six months. Regime forces in these areas are concentrated in the population centers and are separated by great distances in which regime presence is minimal. After the Soviet withdrawal, supplies will have to be delivered by air as the roads are cut by the resistance. Regime defenses around Herat and Qandahar are routinely penetrated by guerrilla forces. []

It is possible Kabul, Gardeyz, Ghazni, and Jalalabad could last longer than six months. Repeated counter-insurgency operations around these cities and along the main roads have forced the insurgents away from the cities and farther into the mountains, especially in the western and southern areas of Kabul. Regime security posts have been established along the routes of access to the capital to keep the insurgents at bay. Unfavorable terrain and large tracts of depopulated areas hamper insurgent mobility, resupply, and communications but help the regime's forces. []

The city that may hold out longest is Mazar-e Sharif. Regime security measures in Mazar-e Sharif as well as favorable terrain around the city permits the regime to control this area more effectively. In addition, the city's proximity to the Soviet Union makes it possible for the regime to receive supplies rapidly to bolster a flagging regime defense. The USSR also could conduct, if it chose to do so, cross-border airstrikes to support the regime. []

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Appendix

The Siege of Sanaa, 1967-68: A Portent for Afghanistan?

The following case study of the siege of Sanaa provides some interesting similarities to the situation that is developing in Afghanistan as the Soviets move toward withdrawal. The Sanaa episode was recently cited by Soviet academics to the US members of the Dartmouth Group as an instance in which an unpopular regime survived against great odds. []

Background—Egypt's War in North Yemen

In September 1962 the centuries-old Yemeni monarchy lead by Imam Badr was overthrown by a group of Republican army officers. The officers forced the monarch to flee to the mountainous northern part of Yemen where he gathered his forces and began a guerrilla war. The regime, wracked by factionalism, quickly found that its army—much of which deserted to the monarchists—was no match for the Imam's tribal-based forces. In late 1962 the regime asked for Egyptian support to prevent itself from being over-run—Cairo dispatched an expeditionary force that eventually reached 75,000 troops. []

The regime, which by this time controlled only the capital of Sanaa and one or two other cities, relied entirely on Egyptian forces to conduct the counterinsurgency. Regime forces were incapable of offensive operations and the regime itself was torn by internal disputes. From 1962 through 1967 there was a steady stream of new Yemeni prime ministers, army chiefs, and cabinets as Cairo sought to find a Republican leader who could stabilize the situation and extend regime control. The war itself was particularly brutal, marked by extensive Egyptian use of chemical warfare and bombing of civilians. Despite the brutality, the Egyptians made little headway against the well-armed tribal forces who maintained sanctuaries and training camps in Saudi Arabia and received financial and military support from the Saudis, the Iranians, and, according to some accounts, the Israelis. []

Beginning in 1966 the Egyptians—wary of heavy losses and the lack of progress against the monarchist forces—began what they called the “long breath” policy, a withdrawal of their forces from outlying areas and a consolidation of units in and around the large cities and along lines of communication. The consolidation continued through early 1967, but Egypt's humiliating defeat in the June 1967 war with Israel forced Nassir to accelerate the end to Cairo's involvement in Yemen. After negotiations with the Saudis—who agreed to cut off their support for the monarchists in exchange for an Egyptian withdrawal—the Egyptians began their pullout, which was completed in December 1967. []

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The Siege of Sanaa

Most observers estimated the Republican regime would collapse almost immediately after the Egyptians withdrew. The few regime units in outlying areas were pulled to Sanaa as the numerous monarchist forces encircled the city to “crush the head of the snake,” in the words of their commander. The monarchist forces, numbering about 5,000 “regulars” supplemented by an estimated 50,000 tribal warriors lured by promises of loot, were opposed by only 2,000 to 3,000 demoralized Republican troops. []

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But the Republicans did not give up. Gen. Hassan al-Amri, a ruthless army officer, ousted the faction-ridden civilian Republican government, put most of Sanaa's civilian population under arms, and called on the Soviet Union for aid. The Soviets responded with a massive airlift of military equipment via Cairo and, according to several accounts, also supplied mercenary pilots to man the small Yemeni Air Force. []

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Meanwhile, the monarchists besieging the city were relatively inactive. They paused in their military activities for Ramadan and, when the siege resumed in January 1968, the Republicans had made good use of the monthlong respite. Supported by a reinvigorated air force—30 new MIG-17s and pilots arrived from the Soviet Union in late December—they were able to push out of the city and establish posts on key road lines. The monarchist forces, meanwhile, fell to squabbling among themselves over who should lead the assault on the city; logistic problems also developed because of difficulties in moving ammunition into the hills around Sanaa and the cutoff of Saudi aid. []

By February 1968 the monarchist forces were in disarray. Virtually all of the 50,000 irregular tribal forces had melted away and the regular force was also facing desertions. In March, the Republican forces were able to force open many of the roads—including the vital road to the port of Al Hudaydah—and gradually expand the central government's influence through most of the country. By mid-1968, the monarchists had been defeated. []

- Sanaa had access to enough food so that the regime kept its own forces and the civilian population fed despite the siege. Kabul, we believe, relies almost entirely on food imported from northern Afghanistan. Despite stockpiling, we believe the regime would have difficulty feeding the estimated 2 million inhabitants of Kabul over a prolonged siege.
- The Republican regime had substantial popular support from Sanaa's inhabitants—many of whom dreaded the prospect of a return of the monarchists—and faced virtually no internal threat. We believe there is significant support for the insurgents among Kabul's population and that the Najibullah regime would face substantial internal difficulties once the Soviets withdrew. Moreover, the Afghan war is marked by a sharp conflict between Islamic forces and a Marxist regime, an element which was not present in the Yemeni civil war. []

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Is There a Parallel With Afghanistan?

The precedent of a narrowly based, militarily weak Yemeni regime surviving the withdrawal of outside support because of disarray among its opponents is one that has obvious parallels for post-Soviet Afghanistan. The example of the many difficulties a largely tribal-based insurgency has in conducting a lengthy offensive military operation against a city also provides an intriguing parallel potentially applicable to Afghanistan. Nonetheless, there are important differences between that situation and the most likely course of development in post-Soviet Afghanistan:

- Airpower in the form of Soviet-supplied mercenary pilots and airlift of supplies was crucial to the Republican victory. This was possible because the regime was able to keep open the Sanaa airfield, largely because the monarchist forces lacked anything beyond the most rudimentary antiaircraft weapons. The Afghan insurgents, we believe, would be able to shut down the Kabul airport once the Soviets withdraw.

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